

- Hall Offers Amendment to Prohibit Appropriations Funds to go to Bonuses for Senior VA Officials -

- House Passes Largest Single Funding Increase in History of Veterans Administration -

Washington, DC – U.S. Representative John Hall (D-NY19) took his fight for veterans to the floor of the House today by introducing an amendment which would prohibit funds in the 2008 Military Construction and Veterans Affairs Appropriations from being used to grant performance bonuses to senior officials at the Department of Veterans Affairs.

The Associated Press reported in May that senior officials received more than \$3.8 million as performance bonuses in 2006 from the underfunded Veterans Affairs Department that maintains a backlog of over 600,000 claims and recently faced a shortfall of \$1 billion that jeopardized veterans' health care.

"Our veterans deserve accountability from the VA," said Hall on the floor of the House. "There seems to be no connection between the performance reviews of individuals at the VA and the overall performance of the department they oversee."

The 2008 Military Construction and Veterans Affairs Appropriations Bill includes the largest single funding increase in the 77-year history of the Veterans Administration and will:

- Significantly reduce the claims backlog for veterans waiting for disability and other benefits by adding more claims processors.
- Support critical maintenance of VA health care facilities.
- Make five polytrauma centers and three Centers of Excellence for Mental Health and Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) fully- operational this year, to care for those returning Iraq vets.
- Support the development and operation of a toll-free phone and web-based hotline for veterans to report on deficiencies in VA medical facilities and care.
- Increase funding for Inspector General for VA to improve services for veterans and their families and to prevent and deter potential waste, fraud and inefficiencies.

"Today represented a major victory for our nation's veterans and servicemen and women," said Hall. "This Congress is committed to not just honoring these heroes with our praise, but also with the resources and support they have earned."

Appropriations Subcommittee on Military Construction and Veterans Affairs Chairman Chet Edwards (D-TX17) praised Hall for his strong leadership, first on trying to see that this Congress provides the funding to reduce the terrible backlog of veterans waiting for their cases to be considered and, secondly, for bringing to the attention of congress the problems raised by the bonuses given to VA employees at a time when so many are waiting for their benefits.

After offering his amendment, Hall withdrew it from the Appropriations bill in order to work with Chairman Edwards and the Veterans' Affairs Committee on further legislation to reduce the claims backlog and prohibit senior VA officials from receiving bonuses without adequate

performance.

"We have every intention of working with him (Hall) and the Veterans' Affairs Committee on which he serves as a subcommittee chairman to address the inequities of this situation," said Edwards.

"I am going to continue to fight and pursue every available legislative avenue to ensure that America's veterans are paid before senior officials are rewarded with bonuses," said Hall.

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